

**An Archaeological Survey of the Abbey PUD Tract,
Bexar County, Texas**

by

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Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a Phase I archeological survey of the 23 acres in the Abbey PUD Tract for Frost Geosciences at the request of the City of San Antonio. The assessment was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" in order to assess the significance of any cultural resources that might be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The fieldwork consisted of a 100% surface inspection of the property. A cluster of 20th century structures and features comprising a farm and ranch complex was found, but is not of historical significance. No prehistoric remains of note were observed. No further work is recommended.

Introduction

The Abbey tract is bordered on the south by Babcock Road and on the west by Leon Creek across from its juncture with Huesta creek (Figs. 1 and 2). The property is situated on the first terrace above the floodplain and consists of a dense Pleistocene gravel deposit capped with Venus loam soils (1 to 3% slope) and Patrick soils (1 to 3% slope; Taylor et al. 1991). The property was part of a former ranch that consisted of a complex of buildings, including two pier and beam structures, a single room stone structure, a figure "8" gold fish pond, and several barns and other outbuildings marked only by concrete slabs. Material indications are that all structures were constructed during the 20th century.

Archaeological Background

Regional Cultural Sequence

The broad outline of the archaeology of northern Bexar County can be discerned. Major time periods and site types are briefly noted here. These temporal and cultural categories largely follow Hester (2004).

The **Paleoindian** period, 9,200-6,800 B.C., has distinctive chipped stone spear points used in hunting mammoth and other late Ice Age mammals early in the period. Other spear types appear with a shift to bison, deer and other game after the Ice Age ended around 8000 B.C. Known site types in northern Bexar County are *campsites* with flint-chipping debris from stone-tool making and repair. The Pavo Real site, of Clovis age (9,200 B.C.) was excavated near FM1604 and Leon Creek. A later site, dating around 7,500 B.C., was investigated on the grounds of St. Mary's Hall on Salado Creek.

Most recently, the Chandler site on Culebra Creek has been partially excavated, yielding artifacts between 7,500-6,800 B.C.

Sites of the following **Archaic** period are common in northern Bexar County. These peoples were hunters and gatherers as in the earlier Paleoindian period, but lived in an environment very similar to those of modern times. Projectile points used to tip spears (often erroneously called “arrowheads”) change in shape through time, from 6,800 B.C. to 500 A.D. Archaeologists use these forms to recognize more specific time frames within the Archaic (e.g., Early, Middle and Late Archaic). In northern Bexar County, the most distinctive Archaic site is the *burned rock midden*. These large accumulations of fire-cracked limestone result from the use of earth-oven cooking starting around 3,000 B.C. (Black et al. 1997). Such features were part of *larger campsites*, with large amounts of flint debris from tool-making; sometimes, animal bone (dietary remains) and charcoal that can be used for radiocarbon dating. Other Archaic site types include *lithic procurement* areas (where flint cobbles eroded out of the Edwards limestone and were processed), *lithic scatters* (lightly-used areas probably representing short-term hunting and gathering activities), and rarely, *sinkhole burials* (Archaic peoples often disposed of their dead by placing them in sinkholes and caverns).

By 700 A.D., there began to be some changes in the long hunter-gatherer lifeway. The **Late Prehistoric** is first seen with the introduction of the bow and arrow. The stone arrow points are very small (mistakenly called “bird points”), but could be used in hunting game of any size. By 1300 A.D., the economy emphasized buffalo-hunting. Most sites of this era include *campsites*, often in areas previously used by Archaic peoples, *lithic scatters* of this age; and the *lithic procurement areas* of earlier times continued to be used.

During the Historic period, the best known archaeological remains are *ranch and farm houses of cut stone*, dating from the 1840s through the 1880s. Stacked-stone fences also occur. Such sites, including those without surviving structures, are recognized from 19th century pottery fragments, artifacts of glass and metal, etc. Later Historic houses and farmsteads, through the early 1900s, are also found.

Nearby Archaeological Sites

The Leon Creek drainage was first surveyed for archaeological resources by Paul McGuff and William Fawcett in the late 1960s and early 1970; these sites are recorded at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL) at The University of Texas at Austin (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission). Major excavations on Leon Creek were done at the Pavo Real site, noted above, once located south of FM1604 and dating to Paleoindian times (Collins et al. 2003).

The Leon Creek survey by Paul McGuff and William Fawcett in the late 1960s-early 1970s (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission) documented sites both downstream (Shafer and Hester 2006b) and upstream. The upstream sites include 41BX40,41 and 49. All are Archaic-age campsites.

The Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), has carried out a variety of studies in the Leon Creek drainage since the 1970s, including the San Antonio 201 Wastewater Project, during which 41BX505 (a lithic scatter), northeast of the Abbey Tract, was recorded. More recent surveys by CAR have focused on specific strips or locales along the creek (e.g., Cargill 1999; Zapata and Weston 2002). These have located several sites, or reexamined previously recorded sites, mostly upstream and downstream from the Abbey Tract. Cargill's work in the Leon Creek Greenway reported site 41BX1302, a multicomponent site that has been damaged by looting and erosion. Upstream from our survey area, Tennis (1996; see also Tennis and Hard 1995) at sites on Leon Creek not far from the UTSA campus. Tennis' work at 41BX47 has provided data on Leon Creek chronology from Late Paleoindian through Archaic times.

Survey Results

The property was very flat and covered with relatively dense mesquite, huisache, and an under story of thorny brush. Grass mulch littered much of the ground in heavily wooded sections, often preventing good surface visibility. Nevertheless, the setting, topography, and areas of good visibility provided a confident assessment regarding the absence of prehistoric sites.

The southeast section of the property was dominated by a farm-ranch complex. Material evidence included old fence lines, remains of two pier and beam structures, a single room rock structure, a concrete elevated water tower, a figure-eight goldfish pond, the slabs to several outbuildings, and the traces of a track, possibly a horse track, were observed on the property (see Fig. 3 bottom). The smaller and northern most of the pier and beam structures was four-room farmhouse typical of the late 19th and early 20th century farm houses (Shafer and Hester 2006a). The old house may have been converted into a barn, as was often the case. All that remained of this structure were the ruins of the floor (Fig. 4).

South of the frame home ruins was the only standing structure on the property other than the water tower. It is a single room rock structure shown in Figures 5-7). A map showing the dimensions is shown in Figure 8. The roof and door frames were constructed using round nails. The stone structure had a door on the east side, and windows on the east, south, and west sides. The function of the structure is unknown, but it is likely similar to the stone wash house structure on the Woller Tract off Hausman Road (Shafer and Hester 2005).

About 50 feet east of the stone structure is a cylinder-shaped water tower (Fig. 9). This structure is about nine feet in diameter and 19 feet high.

The largest structure was the main ranch house located south of the stone structure. This house had burned, but from the ruins it was possible to make out at least five and possibly six rooms (Fig. 10). This too was a pier and beam wooden structure that was constructed

sometime in the mid twentieth century based on the construction details and materials. The concrete fish pond complete with a fountain was some 60-65 feet southeast of the rock structure and 40 feet east of the main house (Fig. 11).

The pedestrian survey failed to find any evidence of prehistoric features or sites. Only one prehistoric artifact, the distal fragment of a possible Paleoindian projectile point, was observed (Fig. 12).

Summary and Assessment

A pedestrian survey of the Abbey PUD yielded no evidence of prehistoric archaeological sites or features. The visible material remains were those of a 20th century ranch complex that included at least two pier and beam structures, a single room stone structure, a water tower, a figure eight fish pond, and several concrete slabs probably associated with barns and horse lots. The scars of a track, possibly for training race horses, was also observed from aerial photos and confirmed on the ground. None of the structural remains are deemed to have historic significance. Therefore, no further work archaeological is recommended for the Abbey PUD.

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Figures



Figure 1. Aerial view of the Abbey Tract. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.

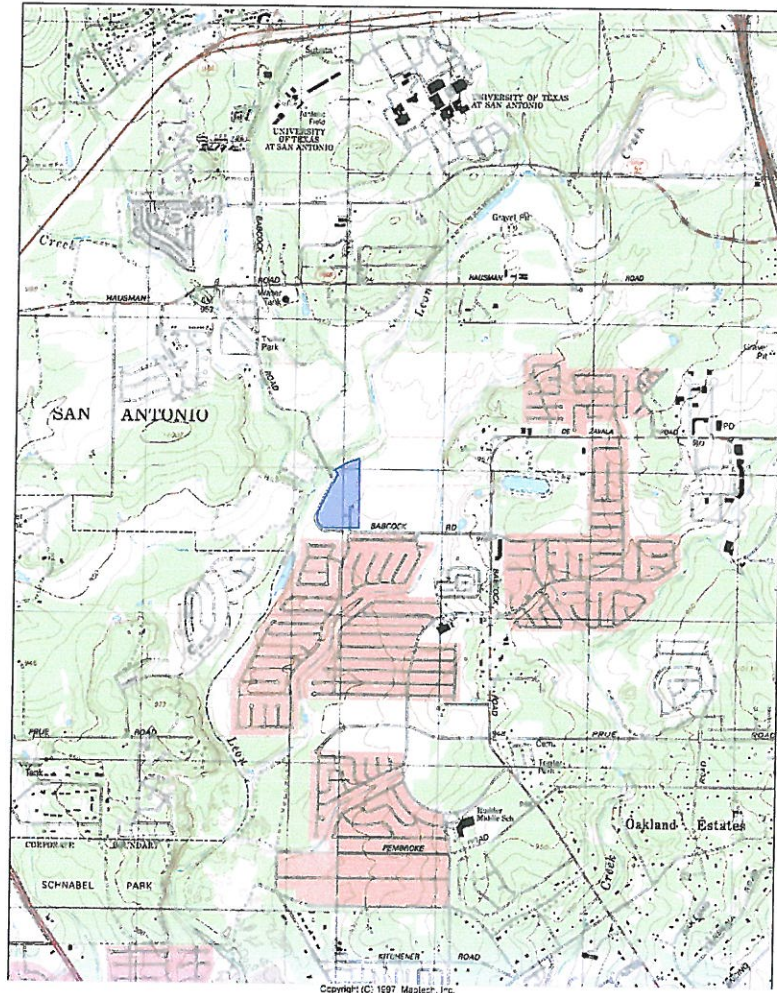


Figure 2. Topographic map showing the location of the Abbey Tract within west San Antonio. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.

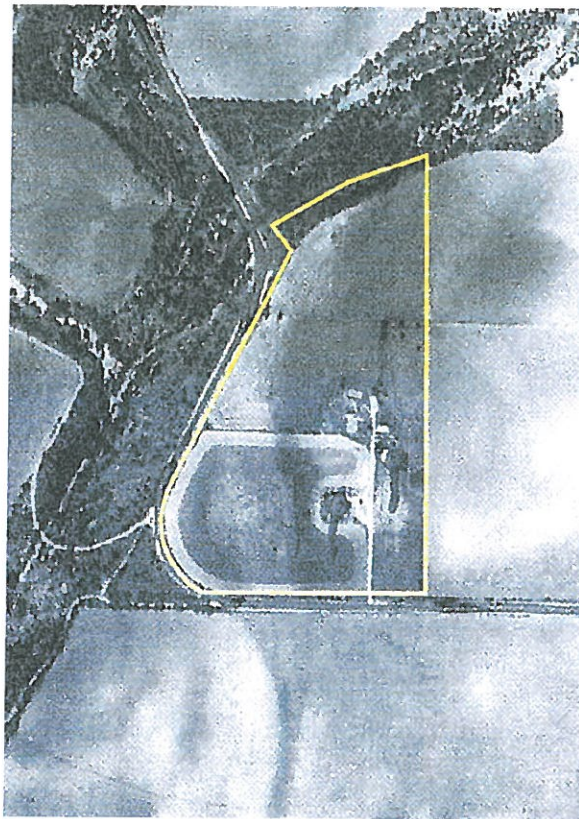


Figure 3. The farm ranch complex shown 1938 aerial view (top) compared to the 1958 aerial view which shows a possible horse training tract. Images provided by Frost GeoSciences.



Figure 4. Ruins of small pier and beam structure.



Figure 5. Single room stone structure seen from the southwest.



Figure 6. Single room stone structure seen from the east.



Figure7. Interior of single room stone structures showing wooden frame, lentils, and graffiti.

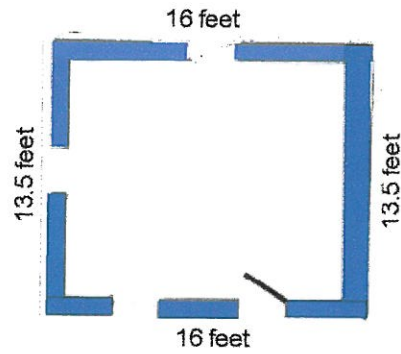


Figure 8. Plan of the single room stone structure. North is to the right.



Figure 9. View of the water tower/cistern.



Figure 10. Burned ruins of the larger pier and beam structure.



Figure 11. Ruins of the figure eight fish pond and fountain.



Figure 12. Possible Paleoindian point fragment recovered from the surface of the Abbey tract.

